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ABSTRACT

This document describes three programs in the juvenile rehabilitation field: (1) VisionQuest, the Tucson-based program that works with youths in wilderness camps, on wagon trains, or in other high impact/adventure formats rather than in conventional residential settings; (2) Paint Creek Youth Center, a small, experimental, staff-secure program in southern Ohio which appears to have put together a fairly unique combination of more conventional treatment methods which together create a very strong program format; and (3) Key Tracking, a Massachusetts program which seems to have developed and institutionalized some of the best techniques for working with juveniles in the community. Each program is described separately, with descriptions based on observations of the programs, interviews with staff and juveniles, and comparison of their treatment methods with successful techniques reported in the evaluation literature. (Author/NB)

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CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS FOR CHRONIC JUVENILE OFFENDERS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

Peter W. Greenwood

March 1988

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PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

If I were asked to name the three most interesting programs I currently know about in the juvenile rehabilitation field they would be: *VisionQuest*, the Tucson-based program that works with youths in wilderness camps, on wagon trains, or in other high impact/adventure formats rather than in conventional residential settings; *Paint Creek Youth Center*, a small, experimental, staff-secure program in southern Ohio which appears to have put together a fairly unique combination of more conventional treatment methods which together create a very strong program format; and *Key Tracking*, one of the many good programs in Massachusetts that grew up in the wake of Jerry Miller's deinstitutionalization efforts and which seems to have developed and institutionalized some of the best techniques for working with juveniles in the community.

In each case the methods used by the programs have a strong intuitive appeal. In each case there is also some empirical evidence to suggest that the treatment methods are having positive effects. And finally in each case these programs have managed to attract and retain a strong following among the judges and senior corrections officials with whom they have worked.

VisionQuest is on the list for a number of reasons. First and foremost, we have recently completed an evaluation which shows that VisionQuest produces substantially lower recidivism rates among its graduates, during the first year after release, than do more traditional probation camp and training school programs (Greenwood and Turner, 1987). Additionally, I was impressed by VisionQuest's management and programming methods when I first encountered them in a study of the California juvenile justice system in 1983 (Greenwood, Lipson, Abrahamse, and Zimring, 1983), and I have continued to be impressed with how the program and the organization have evolved since.

PCYC is on the list, not because of any hard evaluation data (we are now in the midst of collecting data on the first 75 randomly assigned experimental placements and an equal number of controls who were placed in regular Ohio training schools) but because of the way its director, Vicki Agee, has skillfully put together a combination of fairly conventional treatment and management techniques that can serve as a model for other residential programs, unlike VisionQuest which utilizes unconventional techniques that are built upon the unique skills and experiences of its founders.

Key is on the list for its development of practical procedures for training and supervising caseworkers who provide intensive community supervision. While there is no hard evaluative evidence on Key Tracking specifically, there is a recent evaluation of a similar program (Davidson et al, 1987) showing positive results for the techniques utilized by Key. And there is Key's long (15-year) track record of successful operations in this field.

These descriptions are highly selective and subjective. They are based on my observations of the programs, interviews with staff and kids, and comparison of their treatment methods with successful techniques reported in the evaluation literature. There are other programs which might be added to this list if I had time to investigate them in greater depth. I have been favorably impressed by the *Associated Marine Institutes* (AMI) non-residential programs located in a number of southeastern cities, which utilize SCUBA diving, marine sciences, and vocational experience in working with less serious offenders, and small remote residential wilderness camps for more serious youths. I have also been impressed with a number of Positive Peer culture programs located in Michigan including two private programs, *Starr Commonwealth* and *Boysville*, and programs operated by the Michigan Department of Social Services within their training schools. And finally, I have been very impressed with some of the group homes and other community programs that constitute Massachusetts' network of private service providers.

VISIONQUEST

Our evaluation of VisionQuest (Greenwood and Turner, 1987) compared the performance of the first 89 male juveniles committed to that program from San Diego with that of 177 similar youths who had been committed to a camp operated by San Diego County Probation, prior to the initiation of VisionQuest placements. Our analysis of recidivism rates found that the VisionQuest graduates were 16 percent less likely to be arrested during the first year after the release (55 percent rearrest rate for VisionQuest versus

71 percent for the probation camp), a difference that increased to 32 percentage points when we adjusted for the slightly more serious prior records of the VisionQuest sample.

In addition to our study, a recent evaluation of recidivism rates among residential placements in Pennsylvania, performed for that state's Juvenile Judges' Commission, found that VisionQuest graduates performed better than those from any other program (Goodstein and Sontheimer, 1987), although the differences were not statistically significant due to the limited sample size (about 50 cases per program).

The juvenile offenders who were committed to VisionQuest by the San Diego Juvenile Court had generally experienced a number of prior arrests and placements and had become candidates for commitment to the California Youth Authority or one of the privately run 24-hour schools which accepted youth under contract from the county. If the Court determined that an adjudicated youth was an appropriate candidate for VisionQuest, he or she was interviewed by a local VisionQuest staff member to determine whether there was anything about the youth, such as severe emotional or medical problems, that would prevent his full participation in the impact programs. If the youth and his family agreed to placement in VisionQuest, and the Court approved, he was then transported from the San Diego Juvenile Hall to the VQ wilderness camp near Silver City, New Mexico.

Juveniles who were placed in VisionQuest by the San Diego Juvenile Court immediately found themselves residing in a rustic boot camp environment; living in a teepee with six to ten other youths and two junior staff; sleeping on the ground; and engaging in a strenuous physical conditioning program in addition to regular school work. Whenever they acted up or failed to carry out their assigned chores with sufficient attention and enthusiasm, they were confronted and called to account by the senior staff.

When juveniles successfully completed the orientation and training program of the wilderness camp (the average completion time was about three months, but some took up to seven months), they joined one of several wagon trains that traveled the back roads of the Western states from Arizona to Canada covering about 24 miles a day.

Each wagon train consisted of approximately 50 youths and the same number of accompanying staff, a dozen wagons, 60 to 70 horses and mules, and a dozen other support vehicles consisting of school buses, cook wagons, portable toilets and showers, horseshoeing equipment, and vehicles carrying the personal equipment of the staff.

A typical day on the wagon train began with a 5:30 a.m. wake-up call to begin feeding the animals. In the next two hours the tents and camp equipment were dismantled and packed away and the animals hitched to the wagons. By 8:00 or 8:30 a.m. the train was moving down the road with a small complement of youths and staff left behind to pack up

the other vehicles, drive them on to the next camp site, and set up the camp. The wagon trains usually pulled into the next camp site during early afternoon. The animals were unhitched and staked out, and other camp chores attended to. The remainder of the afternoon and early evening hours were devoted to work and other camp chores.

After four to six months on the wagon train, a youth might be placed back in a wilderness camp with greater responsibilities for day-to-day operations, such as helping to break the wild mustangs that VQ acquires each year, or reside in a VisionQuest group home in Arizona where he could attend regular classes and prepare to return home. Indian rituals are used by the staff to celebrate progress of youth through various phases of the program (Adams, 1987).

From a treatment perspective, the principal program components that distinguish VisionQuest from more typical residential programs are: The central role of impact programs in providing experiential education and life skills training; the high staff-to-ward ratio; the close family living arrangements; the use of staff-initiated confrontations to challenge negative behavior; and the emphasis on family issues.

Many juvenile programs involve some type of camping or wilderness experience. The typical Outward Bound experience lasts for about 28 days. Usually, these experiences are scheduled near the end of a youth's program as part of the ritual of graduation.

In VisionQuest participation in the impact programs begins immediately and is much more extensive than in most other programs, lasting from 7 to 12 months. The individual impact programs (wilderness camp, wagon train, sailing, bike trips, etc.) are used to impose a set of graduated performance goals and personal responsibilities on the youth under demanding and unfamiliar conditions. The impact program activities are thought to encourage improved cooperation among youth and staff and increase opportunities for youth to experience the satisfaction of success in overcoming difficult challenges. No attempt is made to disguise the close symbolism between the physical quests pursued within the impact program and the individual quests which the youth are supposed to be pursing in their own personal development. The special requirements imposed by the impact programs give a unique and distinctive appearance to both the daily activities of youth within the program and the issues with which they must deal.

Because of the diverse and sometimes hazardous nature of their daily activities, the prior record of their clients, and the absence of any physical security measures, VisionQuest relies on a very high staff-to-youth ratio (approaching one-to-one) in order to operate their program. In order to hold their personnel costs down, the most junior staff are paid very low wages.

Furthermore, while many other intensive residential programs show a similar staff-to-youth ratio on paper, the actual number of staff present at VisionQuest impact program sites appears higher, because staff reside at the sites, except for their two days off per week, and for all practical purposes are available to deal with any problems if they are needed. In most other programs the staff go home at the end of their shift.

The VisionQuest practice of requiring staff to reside in camp helps foster a more integrated communal/family environment than is the case when staff are only present during their shifts. This tendency is further increased by VisionQuest's practice of employing many married couples who work together within the program, some of whom are raising their own young children within the camp environment.

VisionQuest staff are trained to be sensitive to the troubled and often chaotic family experiences of their clients and are encouraged to demonstrate appropriate adult role models in their relationships with each other and their families. Since many of the youths have experienced physical neglect or abuse, senior staff members are trained and encouraged to give appropriate expressions of affection to the youth in the form of hugs or arms around the shoulder. The semblance of family environment is accentuated by the easy familiarity which develops between youth and staff and the communal nature of the dining, recreation, and other activities.

Most intensive programs recognize the need to make some improvements or at least respond to the problems in a youth's home environment, but VisionQuest goes further than most in attempting to bring the parents of participating youth together in periodic group sessions to identify and deal with the issues that keep arising between them and their children. A constant two-way flow of information is maintained by the program—back to the parents about the progress of their youth and back to the youth about developments at home. Youth are provided opportunities to make periodic phone calls home and parents are encouraged to visit the program sites, and attend special ceremonies scheduled to mark the completion of major program phases.

One of the more controversial features of VisionQuest's treatment approach involves the use of intense verbal confrontations between staff and youth. Confrontations generally begin with three or more staff surrounding a youth, with one assuming a nose-to-nose/eyeball-to-eyeball stance squarely in front of the youth. The verbal style is loud and challenging. If a youth tries to turn or back away, he will be held in position to maintain eye contact. In the past, if the youth resisted or struck out at the staff, he was taken to the ground and held in a prone restraint. In response to criticism of this practice from a number of

sources, VisionQuest has recently revised their policy to permit only standing restraints rather than wrestling the youth to the ground. A confrontation may continue anywhere from five to thirty minutes or until the staff feel the issue has been resolved. During this period a youth might go through a sequence of first arguing, then struggling, then crying, being still, and then engaging in quiet conversation. The restraining holds of the staff would change to affectionate hugs near the end of the process. No attempt is made to hide these confrontations, which go on throughout the day in the midst of other activities.

PAINT CREEK YOUTH CENTER

In contrast to the unconventional impact programs, Native American rituals, and staffing pattern employed by VisionQuest, PCYC combines a set of fairly conventional treatment strategies to produce a very intensive program environment. Paint Creek is one of several programs operated by New Life Youth Services, a non-profit social service agency serving the greater Cincinnati area with a network of group and foster homes, shelters, and work experience programs. The Paint Creek program was started as an experimental program in 1985 with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Ohio Department of Youth Services. PCYC is being evaluated by RAND along with several other programs under Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Private Sector Corrections Initiative.

The Paint Creek program was developed by its current director, Vicki Agee, who had previously directed the Closed Adolescent Treatment Center in Denver, a nationally recognized program for violent juvenile offenders. PCYC serves older youths from southwestern parts of the state who are committed to the Ohio Department of Youth Services for serious felonies. Eligible youths are assigned to PCYC or one of the regular training schools on a random basis for minimum one-year terms. The Paint Creek program combines elements of Positive Peer Culture and Guided Group Interaction, which Vicki had developed and refined in Colorado, with innovative approaches to family work, work experience, and intensive community supervision. Some of the more interesting features of the Paint Creek program are the Problem Oriented Record System (PORS), peer booking system, personality-based classification system, pattern of program phases, team-based management system, family program, and intensive aftercare supervision.

The PORS is a systematic procedure for identifying each youth's most serious problems (anger management, self-centeredness, laziness, etc.), assets (trustworthiness, athletic ability, etc.), and specific activities for working on the problems. The initial inputs

for the PORS are assembled and reviewed at a treatment team conference which occurs about six weeks after a youth has been placed in the programs. Progress on each specified problem, changes in treatment approach, and the identification of new problems or assets form the basis for monthly progress reports to the committing court. The process of reviewing and commenting on the PORS also provides one important mechanism for the senior staff to supervise diagnostic and planning efforts of the junior staff, who have primary responsibility for the cases.

The youth are referred to by staff and each other as "peers," a term derived from the Positive Peer Culture whose chief requirement is that all peers assume responsibility for correcting each other's behavior. A youth who observes some negative behavior on the part of another peer is expected to point out the problem to the offending youth and warn him to stop. If the behavior continues, the reporting youth is expected to report it to the discipline committee through the use of a "booking slip," which must in turn be signed by the nearest staff member. The discipline committee, consisting of one staff and one peer, investigates the matter and assigns an appropriate punishment (loss of T.V. or snack privileges, etc.) for the offending behavior.

The typical one-year period of residence at PCYC is broken up into several phases beginning with a short orientation period in which the new youth just watches but does not interact with staff or the other peers. Promotion to successive phases requires accomplishment of specific behavioral goals and periods of sustained satisfactory performance. During the last phase peers are allowed to apply for positions in farming, maintenance, or woodshop, in which they can work half time and for which they are paid. Deductions are made to pay any required restitution or child support. Serious negative behavior can result in being placed on Disciplinary Level during which a peer again just observes but does not participate in activities or interact with other peers.

The peers participate in daily group sessions lasting about 90 minutes. Since the director subscribes to the theory that peers and staff with similar personalities work better together than opposing personality types, youths are categorized as either "expressive" or "instrumental" and assigned to a team leader of the same type.

The instrumental and expressive team leaders and their deputies are next in the chain-of-command after the director. Counselors, teachers and youth workers work for the team leaders. The team leaders monitor the progress of each peer and the activities of the junior staff in dealing with them through the PORS. The focus of the group meetings, which are usually run by the team leader, varies from dealing with specific relationships or problems within the to PCYC community to more general problems like anger management, defusing violence, or drug resistance training.

Families are informed of the treatment plan at the initial staffing and kept apprised of their children's progress throughout their stay. During later phases parents are encouraged (through provision of free transportation) to participate in special family group sessions on every other Sunday, in which parents sit in the regular treatment groups. These family groups focus on special family issues and utilize training material specifically developed for this purpose.

When a peer leaves Paint Creek he is virtually under house arrest on what is called "permission status," allowing him to leave his house only with the permission of his community caseworker and only for the purposes and periods specified. Over the next few weeks this control is turned over to the parents and then gradually loosened, under the close supervision of the caseworker, who is also assisting the youth to obtain appropriate schooling or work.

In order to keep all these activities running smoothly the director and the team leaders engage in a variety of training and team building efforts. Staff spend a good deal of time critiquing each other's performance and working out solutions to administrative problems as a group. A number of staff have been dismissed or encouraged to leave (including both original team leaders) for not being able or willing to engage in this process with a sufficient degree of enthusiasm.

It is still too early to tell whether Paint Creek graduates will perform any better after they leave the program than the control youth assigned to regular training schools. But most visitors to Paint Creek are very favorably impressed by the behavior and demeanor of the youths while they are in the program. Out of the initial 65 placements only 3 have been removed from the program for serious disciplinary infractions or failure to adjust. The Ohio judges and DYS officials have been so impressed by the program that they are already looking for ways to replicate it in other sites.

KEY TRACKING

The Paint Creek program employs only two community caseworkers, each working with about six youths in the community at a time. By the time a youth is released under their supervision they have visited him many times at Paint Creek and gotten to know his family fairly well.

The Key Program Inc., headquartered in Framingham, Massachusetts, specializes in working with similar youths in Massachusetts after they leave any one of a number of private residential programs, or slightly less serious offenders who are permitted to continue living at home. Key community caseworkers (trackers) work in teams of three under an experienced supervisor. Each tracker has primary responsibility for about eight youths. But all caseworkers are familiar with all the other cases assigned to their teams. Trackers see their youths several times a day, starting out with a check be sure that they are in school or at work, and ending with a bed check late at night.

Trackers typically have a Bachelors degree in psychology, social work, or a related field. They are expected to work about 70 hours a week, including every third weekend, when they take their youths out for recreational activities in addition to the regular supervision. Trackers are allowed to serve in that function for only 14 months after which they must either be promoted or move on to another agency. In addition to monitoring behavior and general counseling, trackers also work to improve communications with family members and assist youths in obtaining appropriate schooling and employment.

One of the important elements of the Key program appears to be the close supervision and continuous training provided to the trackers. Team members meet with their supervisors at least once a week to review the progress of each case and discuss specific treatment or community advocacy issues with program consultants. One of the best ways to learn about the program is to sit in on these sessions and hear the level of detail the trackers get into with each of their cases.

Key is able to provide the tracking services described for about $20 per day. They also offer a service called Tracking Plus in which youths begin by residing in a small residential facility operated by the program, and gradually make the transition to residing in their homes. However they can be returned to the residential facility for short periods if they fail to perform well in the community.

While there are no evaluations on Key itself, there has been an evaluation of a similar program that showed very favorable results. Over several years William Davidson and his colleagues (1987) at the University of Michigan assigned delinquents to various forms of community supervision, including some that closely resembled the Key format. Under one plan, college student volunteers who had received 80 hours of training in theoretically based methods of behavior contracting, advocacy and family work were assigned to work one-on-one with delinquents who had been placed on probation. These volunteers received close supervision and weekly training from graduate students who had been trained by the

principal investigators. Recidivism rates (as measured by court petitions within two years after release) for youths supervised by these volunteers were significantly lower than those of similar youths (there was random assignment among alternative conditions) receiving regular court supervision, or supervision by volunteers not trained in the specific behavioral and family work techniques.

CONCLUSIONS

For the last ten years programs designed to improve the behavior of serious juvenile offenders have labored under the cloud of "nothing works," the series of reviews of the evaluation literature that concluded there was no evidence supporting one treatment approach over any other, or over no treatment at all (Lipton, Martinson and Wilks, 1975; Sechrest et al, 1979; Greenberg, 1977). Those reviews were based on fairly simplistic notions about what distinguished one treatment approach from another (the principal form of treatment) and were rather insensitive to differences in program integrity and quality of implementation.

We are now beginning to see program reviews which include quality of implementation as a discriminating variable (Gendreau and Ross, 1979, 1987) and make use of recently developed meta-analysis techniques that allow one to preserve and compare the size of observed treatment effects (Garrett, 1985) rather than just indicating their mere presence or absence as was the case in the earlier reviews.

Unfortunately, the accumulation of such positive evidence will be slow and laborious. Few programs are subject to rigorous evaluation and many that are will not produce positive results due to poor designs or inadequate implementation. Corrections officials must continue to integrate and temper these findings with their own experience and that of their colleagues in implementing alternative strategies. Any effort they can make to ensure that new program approaches are rigorously tested will help guide their own agencies and other colleagues in the field to more productive approaches.

Our analysis of delinquent career patterns (Greenwood and Turner, 1987) suggests that chronic juvenile offenders with five or more prior arrests and 80 percent recidivism rates will, on the average, continue to be active offenders for an additional period of 10 to 13 years, over which they will commit approximately 125 crimes and be incarcerated about 40 percent of the time. Reducing their recidivism rates to only 60 percent would reduce their future correctional costs by $50,000 and their crimes by about half. Surely these community safety benefits are worth the effort it takes to design and operate effective treatment

programs, especially when we compare them to the high costs and modest apparent benefits of the alternative incapacitation and deterrence approaches.

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